

THE LOCAL CHURCH
IN SERVICE TO THE SENIOR ADULT

by
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ABSTRACT

Modern society is providing medical benefits which permit people to live longer, healthier lives. Hence, the fastest growing age group in America is the senior citizen at the rate of 1,000 people per day becoming sixty-five.

A high percentage of this group is retired from work. Due to forced retirement people must live on smaller incomes. The result is that the elderly are the fastest growing poverty group in America. One out of every three people 65 and over live in poverty, which is living on an income less than \$2,000 per year.

Physical and emotional problems are brought on or made worse by denial of employment opportunities. People need to live creative, useful lives before and after retirement. Nearly 40 per cent of 20 million retired Americans would prefer to be actively engaged in work which would permit them to contribute to society. This would permit them to keep their self respect and live independently of others. While the American people as a rule honor and respect the elderly, it is only lip service. National policies reflect the conflict of caring on one hand and rejection on the other. Also reflected is the feeling of the American public of wanting to be kind to the elderly and at the same time deny the phase of life of aging. The people of a youth centered culture find it difficult to accept aging and death and so deny its rightful place in social concerns.

We can theologically equate this to the story of Adam and Eve, who in the Garden rejected God's plan for life. As Adam and Eve disobeyed the command not to eat of the tree, so also does modern man

deny God's plan of birth, growth, aging and death. In the denial, mankind finds the results of his disobedience, which is alienation, estrangement from God and himself. When mankind can accept the plan and process of life and death as is represented in Jesus Christ, the messenger of God and the redeemer of life, it will reaffirm aging and death and find therein the redemptive qualities in both. The church of Jesus Christ is called to serve the will and plan of God in assisting people to accept themselves in the aging process and to help them develop a retirement career. The church is called to sensitize the community to the needs of the elderly and to assist the elderly in maintaining a maximum level of participation in life with ever increasing physical and economical limitations.

The church is encouraged to offer practical experiences for the aging by offering a course entitled "Planning Your Own Retirement Center." The ten session course which involves the minister of the local church and resource people from the community deal with all the legal, economic, social, psychological, vocational and spiritual aspects of retirement and aging. The church is also challenged to offer courses for personal development involving the aging with younger members of the congregation in growth group experiences. The children of aging parents hold a special role in assisting the elderly in the retirement process, hence the church by offering a course for the adult child fulfills its responsibility to the aging more completely. Such a course is offered in the paper. It concentrates on caring for the aging in the areas of the physical and psychological process of aging, housing, managing business affairs, death and dying.

There are special resources in the community to assist the church in serving the elderly. Federal and state financed low cost housing for the elderly is suggested as a project for the local church, plus a unique program of "resident counseling" which is being offered by three housing projects in San Diego, California.

Another community resource to assist the local church in serving the elderly is the senior adult community. They are a people of many talents, free time, and they can identify the needs of the aging. The seniors are able to serve not only the aging in the community but also the local church in its efforts to serve all ages.

In conclusion, the impact of the serious nature of an exploding senior adult population has not been recognized by local churches as a rule. There are exceptions. The minister and the local congregation need awakening to the call and the challenge of serving the elderly even if it means putting other projects aside to create a task force on aging for the purpose of alleviating problems of the aging and to assist in the personal adjustment of the aging process to maintain proper self regard and participation in a life with ever increasing limitations.

INTRODUCTION

An elderly woman walked down the main aisle of the church rather slowly and with a cane just before the morning service started. She sat down next to a friend and remarked, "the doctors have given me two new knees, it's like learning to walk all over again. Now it's time to get back to church and do something for my heart and for my head."

Medical doctors are doing wonderful things for people. They are restoring the elderly with new knees, new hip sockets and life-lasting pace makers for their hearts. While medical science renews the body, the church is called to bring meaning to persons. The church is called to serve the elderly in the community as well as children, youth and adults. The Judeo-Christian tradition is respectful of the aging. "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent," records the psalmist. (Ps. 71:9) We also recall, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. The years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone and we fly away. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." (Ps. 90:1,10,12)

God looks upon the life of a person to be of value. Each period of the life of a person is to be valued. Not only is the beginning of life to be celebrated, but also its middle and also its closing period. The American culture does not regard life in these terms. Dr. Robert Butler, Director of the National Institute of Aging reports,

The American attitudes toward the old are contradictory. We pay lip service to the idealized images of beloved and tranquil grandparents, wise elders, white haired patriarchs. But the opposite image disparages the elderly, seeing age as decay, decrepitude, a disgusting and undignified dependence. Our national social policies mirror these conflicts.¹

Communities are not consistent in the way they think of the senior citizen. They are politely honored with words and then overlooked when it comes to receiving proper consideration from industry, government or private owned business. At retirement age the senior citizen is forced to step away from his job to permit someone else to take his place. The community then complains about the large number of retired persons who draw aid from the government creating a financial tax burden to working persons.

The government has also failed to be properly concerned with the physical, mental and emotional needs of the senior citizen. Some medical assistance programs have been created but they have not been designed well enough to do an adequate work with seniors. Medical doctors in communities are not made to cooperate with government programs, hence many of them refuse to assist senior citizens who must count on government medical insurance.

The American culture romanticizes childhood, idolizes young adulthood and politely ignores the senior members of the community. The growing numbers of elderly are products of medical advancement. So far, the community has not made adequate preparation to assist them. The church must be concerned about this important condition because the problem is going to grow. According to the U.S. Public Health Service,

¹Robert Butler, Why Survive? Being Old In America (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), Preface, XI.

the average life expectancy of a 25-year-old man is 45 more years. The man of 30 can count on 41 more years. People do live longer today than they did a generation ago. There are more older people in our communities since they are living longer lives. Therefore the church must consider anew its responsibilities to the aging members of society. The church has a great opportunity to care for people and to help make retirement years meaningful and to see that services are available to maintain independence and dignity.

This paper presents the proposition that the local church can become a very vital agency in assisting retired persons and others who are nearing the age of retirement. The local church can offer a specialized assistance to give hope to the elderly who are entering the next important phase of their lives. The local church can give practical help by assisting people with suggestions for successful retirement as well as be their friend and companion when the years become lonely. The Christian faith can also help one appreciate life as a gift and a privilege, to be lived to its fullest and to find life's greatest joys in the here and now.

CHAPTER I

AGING IN AMERICA

A very interesting and important population change has been taking place on the American scene the past ten years. Medical science has made an impact on the general health of people and the length of their lives. At the same time that there has been a general increase in the population, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of older people who are of the age of 65 and older.

Between 1960 and 1970 the total population of the United States according to the official census figures, rose by about 24 million persons, from about 179 million to about 203 million. That represented, in the decade, an increase of 14%. During the same period, however, the proportionate increase in the population 65 years and over was greater than the general increase. During the decade the number of persons over 65 rose by 20% (about 4.5 million) and the number of those 75 and over increased by more than 37% (about 2 million). Less official figures than those of the census reports suggest that the proportion of people over 65 has continued to rise since 1970.¹

A population explosion of older people has been underway for a number of years, and the elderly are now the fastest growing group in the United States. People 65 and over now comprise 10% or more of the population. Between 1960 and 1970 the number of aging people increased by 21% compared with an 18% increase for those under 65. Whereas in the past, illnesses such as influenza, pneumonia, tuberculosis, typhoid and paratyphoid fever, diphtheria and scarlet fever were major killers, causing high death rates along the life cycle, now more people are

¹Seward Hiltner, "Facts and Needs, Present and Future," in his Toward a Theology of Aging, (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1975), p. 98.

reaching old age due to medical advances in the prevention and treatment of diseases. New drugs and progress in medical techniques now allow many old people to survive once fatal illnesses. What this now means is that every day 1,000 people reach the age of 65; each year 365,000. With new medical discoveries, an improved health-care system and the presently declining birth rate, it is possible that the elderly will make up one-quarter of the total population by the year 2000. According to Dr. Robert Butler,

The presence of so many elderly, and the potential of so many more, has been a puzzlement to gerontologists, public health experts and demographers, who don't know whether to regard it as 'the aging problem' or a human triumph over disease. What is clear is that it will result in enormous changes in every part of society.²

This information raises serious concerns for the nation. It should also catch the attention of every local church leader. Are people really ready to live longer healthier lives? Is the national community ready to have a much larger number of older people continue to live? What adjustments will be necessary for the older person to live a longer life? What adjustments are necessary for the community to make in which the elderly live? The most qualified minds must be given over to this national problem of more active elderly people on the community scene or a calamity of significant proportions could take place in the near future.

There are already signs of a serious problem. The first that we take note of is that of forced retirement. This does not affect those people who own their own businesses or work in businesses where

²Robert Butler, Why Survive? Being Old In America (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 16.

retirement is voluntary. This affects those people who upon a certain date because of their age have to resign from their work and a full time salary. Whatever the intention of Congress may have been, the Social Security Act of 1935 had the effect of establishing age sixty-five in the minds of employers and the general public as the one at which workers ought to retire regardless of their health, vigor, intelligence, or alertness.

While periods of unemployment in the past were temporary, this one is permanent. The person who reaches the age of sixty-five in good health suddenly realizes that he faces perhaps twenty years of unemployment--a period as long as infancy, childhood, and adolescence combined. As much as he or she may have enjoyed leisure and may have looked forward to vacations during the working years, the person knows this vacation is going to be much too long.³

It is interesting that people ordinarily do not give concern to this phase of life before it comes, hence there is a crisis to deal with. They suddenly find themselves forced to retire and to live on a limited income. Many suffer premature death because they cannot make an adjustment to retirement. A Harris Poll revealed that while younger people think an even lower retirement age would be desirable, some 86 percent of those past sixty-five respond affirmatively to the statement "Nobody should be forced to retire because of age if he wants to continue working and still is able to do a good job."⁴

The American Medical Association's Committee on Aging reports that there is ample clinical evidence that physical and emotional

³Paul Woodring, "Why 65, The Case Against Mandatory Retirement," Saturday Review, III:22 (August 7, 1976), 18.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

problems can be brought on or made worse by denial of employment opportunities. It charges that setting a chronological age for retirement inflicts enforced idleness, which is characterized as a disease or disability producing condition that is no less devastating than cancer, tuberculosis or heart disease. Can we therefore state that people want to live useful, purposeful lives while they are able to do so, and are seriously wounded when they are not permitted to do so?

A 1974 Harris Poll revealed that nearly 40 percent of 20 million Americans now retired would prefer to be actively engaged in work that would allow them to contribute to the mainstream of American society. This suggests that eight million individuals who could continue to be productive members of society are forced by present laws to be retired. This is the kind of society we live in and one that is producing not only great rewards but also great problems.

It is important to be aware that there is also another possibility in the aging picture. Retirement need not mean the breakdown of an individual, but instead, retirement may provide an opportunity to enjoy a new life. Dr. Robert Butler writes:

There is much mythology built into the notion of an emotional and physical condition known as the 'retirement syndrome,' characterized by anxiety and depression. People who retire do not automatically develop declining mental and physical health. What social science studies we have indicate such generalizations to be a fallacy.⁵

Many people become happier, even healthier after retirement than while they were working, especially those who did not care that

⁵Butler, p. 72.

much about their jobs and who have had other interests they have always wanted more time to pursue. A retiree often has more opportunity to take care of himself, to eat and exercise properly, to get enough rest, to enjoy play and leisure without guilt, and still derive much satisfaction from continuing to work fruitfully, though preferably not too competitively. If the inner person is prepared for retirement psychologically speaking and financial income and expenses can be reasonably managed, there are very good chances that retirement will be some of the very best years. Attitude about oneself and his place in life is of utmost importance.

We know from medical science that the human organism does deteriorate with age, yet many people in their later years take up sports and other vigorous activities they have never tried before, developing new skills, new muscular strength and physical endurance, new powers of coordination. Even sexual powers though gradually diminishing, are still present and employable essentially throughout life. According to Dr. Jean Houston, Director of the Foundation for Mind Research, "In many cultures, old age is expected to be the most satisfying stage of life."⁶

After studying long-lived people in a diversity of cultures, Dr. David Gutmann, of the University of Michigan, concluded that "active mastery is the ego state most clearly associated with longevity." He refers not to powers over others, but to a sense of being master of one's own life and circumstances. In another study

⁶Quoted in Albert Rosenfeld, "The Willy Loman Complex," Saturday Review, III:22 (August 7, 1976), 24.

of longevity, covering 2,000 subjects over a period of nineteen years, Dr. Robert Samp, of the University of Wisconsin Medical School, noted that an important ingredient was a continuing interest in the future. When these two factors are missing, their opposites, helplessness and hopelessness, tend to take over. This is the well known "giving up" syndrome, with its serious physiological consequences.

As people age they become more aware of the temporariness of life and the nearness of physical death. Honest, alert older people are aware of their own mortality. They deal with death in their own way for they know that they have no choice. Death will come for no one lives forever on this earth. Yet depending on how they look on it, they either degenerate into death or they use the awareness of death as a way to life, to deepen and broaden life while it is still available. Not fearing death, but seeing it as a friend and not an enemy can give an appreciation for life and an encouragement to make the best use of it, living it to the fullest. Time becomes more precious as it decreases in availability.

As important as time comes to be in the later years of life, so also is self respect and living independently of others. Basic to self respect and independence is the matter of finances. Most people do not know the plight of many elderly who do not enjoy sound financial retirement programs. These elderly poor drop out of view of the American public. The number of the elderly poor have been increasing while the poverty roles of other ages have been decreasing. Between 1900 and 1960 the population of the United States increased 250 percent. In the same period of time, the population of those aged 65 and over increased 500 percent. One out of every three people

aged sixty five and over lives in poverty, which is less than \$2,000 per year and this is a conservative estimate. What comes along with poverty is more devastating. It is a dehumanizing process which has moved many people to dread the experience of aging and to hope for an early death.

The U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, using the conservative government established poverty threshold, reported that in 1969 there were approximately 4.8 million people aged 65 and older who were living in poverty, almost 200,000 more than in 1968. In this same period, said the committee, poverty declined by 1.2 million for all other age groups.

Reporter Mark Harris writes:

In America today there is an almost dread of aging--and for good reasons. Expelled from the work forces at 65, no longer thought productive or economically useful, the old are banished to segregated retirement communities if they can afford them, to nursing homes if they cannot. . . . Isolated, impoverished, embittered, a burden to their children, many elderly live out their final years in despair or muted rage.⁷

One would not think this would have to happen in the most affluent nation in the world. Is it necessary that the elderly must become the fastest growing poverty group in America? Elderly poverty is not transmitted from generation to generation. Instead, this is new poverty with people who have not had this experience in their working lifetime. New high costs of living, serious diseases and the sheer cutback of income in retirement may create instant poverty where none previously existed. Many of the elderly poor have become poor

⁷Mark Harris, "How To Make It To 100," New West Magazine, II:1 (January 3, 1977), 16.

after becoming old. Who looks forward to aging when instant poverty comes with it? This tragic situation deserves the attention of the citizenry of the nation.

There is a national crisis which needs to be met. The nature of the crisis is in the hearts and minds of the elderly. With thousands of them coming to the age of retirement weekly, still needing something worthwhile to do to maintain their own self respect and independence, they are turned loose from their jobs, told to live on smaller salaries in communities which are not prepared to help them adjust to a new stage of life. The elderly need an opportunity to live some semblance of a normal life. How will that happen unless someone cares?

Proposed in this paper are several programs for the local church to assist people facing retirement by helping them plan their own retirement career. Practical instruction for the children of aging parents in a five session course to be offered at the local church is presented. Community resources which can provide funds for the church to use to carry out a ministry to the aging in the area of housing and counselling are explained in the following chapters. The elderly are invited to be involved in a self help effort in the local church. This information is intended to contribute to several neglected areas in the life of the senior citizen of America to help the final years be richly rewarding.

CHAPTER II

A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

The people of early biblical times honored outstanding people in their history in many different ways. To have recorded that someone lived to a very old age was a way of paying tribute to that person, for aging was an honored time of life in the family. The position of Elder in the community was an official position and was held by one of the elderly men who was considered experienced and wise. True, not just any old man could become the Elder though indeed the experience and wisdom of the older man would fit him for such judicial and administrative responsibilities as the elder discharged.

The biblical character Methuselah is reported to have lived 969 years before he died. He may or may not have been a historical person. His age is not to be taken literally. But it is important to note that the meaning of the name Methuselah is "worshipper of God." The counterpart to that name is Methushael, which means "man of God." Either Methuselah impressed his peers with his faithfulness to God in worship and was honored with a high number of years, or the biblical authors were implying that God favors the one who is faithful to him with long life. The good fortune of a long life was understood as a blessing from God.

The number of years of a person's age did carry theological significance. Yaweh was a God who had lived beyond time and was very wise. Hence their concept of a great person was one who was both long lived and wise. They believed the wisdom of God and the wisdom of

the elders was related. Irrelevant are the fantastically long lives of the mythological fathers of the human race in the early chapters of Genesis and even the historically long lives of the semi-historical Hebrew patriarchs. Yet these people were honored with high numbered years to denote their place and importance to the history of Israel. Had people not thought highly of aging, they would not have honored them in this way.

The aged commanded and enjoyed respect. A precept in the Holiness Code directs: 'You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of an old man' (Leviticus, 19:32a). This respect for the aged is like the honor shown to parents (Exodus 20:12), as indeed a New Testament passage recognizes (I Timothy 5:1-2) cf. also Ruth 4:15; Proverbs 23:22. In his description of a chaotic society Isaiah includes as a symptom:

The youth will be insolent to the elder,
and the base fellow to the honorable
(Isaiah 3:5b);

The elders were esteemed as men of experience and custodians of the tradition:

Remember the days of old,
consider the years of many generations;
ask your father, and he will show you;
your elders, and they will tell you
(Deuteronomy 32:7).

Elihu keeps his counsel until his elders among Job's friends have finished, expecting wisdom from them:

I said, 'Let days speak,
and many years teach wisdom'
(Job 32:7).

It was, accordingly, an honor to attain advanced age, and a sign of God's favor: 'The beauty of old men is their gray hair' (Proverbs 20:29), and

A hoary head is a crown of glory;
it is gained in a righteous life
(Proverbs 16:31).¹

To the Hebrews and other people of the mid-east, aging was an honored place in the community. The very fact that enemies had not

¹Sheldon H. Blank, "Old Age," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), I, 55.

destroyed the aged person meant that God had been watching over him/her. Hence the community would revere that person as a favored one of God. There was no such thing as luck. Everything had a purpose under God, including old age.

A THEOLOGY OF THE PERSON

To achieve a statement of a theology of aging, the author believes some statement of a theology of the person is necessary. In the Judeo-Christian tradition beliefs about the person can be grouped around three central ideas. First, people are made in the image of God. Scripture records, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). The author seeks to express a profound fact about human beings. They are made in a spiritual likeness to the creator. They are like God in spiritual powers in the power of thought, the power of communication and the power of self transcendence. Christians have felt the "image of God" within each individual was a very important concept:

God has given us in our human nature a reflection (not a physical likeness) of his own divinity. We can know, we can worship and we can love. God has lent us a spark of His creative power, so that within limits we control the conditions of our lives.²

Mysteriously residing within every human being at any age is the capacity of responding to the creativity and spiritual instruction of

²Daniel D. Williams, "Christian Teaching and Christian Beliefs" Board of Homeland Ministries (Boston: Pilgrim Press), p. 15. Reprint Children's Religion, (February, 1955).

God the Creator, which Christians believe makes them responsible to Him.

The second central idea of the Judeo-Christian tradition is that of the Fall. The full meaning of the image of God in a person's creation is seen when we consider the idea of the Fall. Human life is marred by estrangement and sin on its own initiative as is portrayed in the scripture:

But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. . . . therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken (Genesis 3:4-6, 23).

The creation story, in the book of Genesis, carries a sequel, which is a parable of what Everyman (Adam) does when God puts him in the Garden of Eden 'to till it and keep it.' Adam and Eve are portrayed as having all they need, even though they do not have everything. God has given them the whole garden, with the exception of the fruit on one tree. And it was not until the serpent slyly insinuated that they were missing out on something that they began to want it all.³

There is great imagery in the story of the creation and the fall. The imagery is quite expressive of our human experience. Man is given the opportunity to make choices in the garden. He is free to choose and make responsible choices, or he is free to do otherwise. Adam chooses otherwise and is cast out of the garden. What the Christian faith says is that we are all involved in sin. There are countless degrees, varieties, stages and limits of sin in any individual life. Man cannot save himself from making irresponsible

³Allen O. Miller, Invitation to Theology (Philadelphia: Christian Education Press, 1958), p. 84.

choices. Even good people become proud and self satisfied and separated from God. The continuation of mankind to sin, abuse his freedom and remain prideful and egocentric, creates great distance as well as great estrangement between himself and God. God decides to take a new initiative, according to Paul, a converted Christian, by sending his Son Jesus Christ.

The third central idea about man is that he can be restored to new life. This is salvation or redemption. God acts in human history in a unique way to break the hold of sin on man. He seeks to provide a new start for man by providing a "new model" or a new image of man, to restore mankind to the position he had before the fall:

We see two different kinds of redemption in the Bible; sometimes it means what men do for themselves to effect deliverance from danger and the other is God himself as the redeemer, bringing release or renewal. Grace is most apparent in the second because God provides on His own account the means necessary to set men free, especially freedom from sin, from sinning and from the fruits of sin.⁴

It is the second concept which is followed in the New Testament. God chooses to initiate a freedom movement for all people by sending His own Son into the world. God knew people needed to be set free from a power greater than themselves, and it is this that God sets Himself to accomplish in Jesus Christ. "It cannot be accomplished without cost; but God lays the cost upon himself since what the Son endures the Father also endures, and both endure it from the same motive of Holy love."⁵ Just as there is mystery concerning the image

⁴M. S. and J. L. Miller, Harper's Bible Dictionary (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 606.

⁵Ibid.

of God in man there is mystery of how God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. D. M. Baillie, provokes our thoughtfulness when he suggests that the task of theology is to think out the meaning of the Christian conviction that God was incarnate in Jesus, that Jesus is God and Man.⁶

There is no doubt that the person of Jesus Christ has a very powerful saving influence upon the lives of people who will do a study of Him and permit His religious philosophy a chance to impress their lives. The new model for man is an inspiration for people to leave past enslavements to sin and self-seeking behind. Historically there has never been a figure on the human scene that has influenced people and their lives as has Jesus Christ. The spiritual-emotional as well as intellectual response of people who have been encountered by His presence, or His word, or His example have been moved to proclaim, "Christ is Lord." Seward Hiltner observes:

Thus, the doctrine of the incarnation, God's enfleshing Himself in Jesus in order to share fully in the human predicament in order to rescue mankind, was a radical reaching out of God's word beyond any possible obfuscation in abstractions so that all men, actually seeing and touching, might grasp the intent of the word of God that had been given all along but never before in such complete and comprehensive fashion. This was and is the conviction of the Christians.⁷

The author of the Gospel of John would have us remember, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The

⁶D. M. Baillie, God Was In Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 83.

⁷Seward Hiltner, Theological Dynamics (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 172.

apostle Paul would have us study:

For while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation (Romans 5:10-11).

Both Paul and the author of John were convinced that the coming of Jesus Christ into human history removed death and estrangement from God. Christ had entered the world for the purpose of reinstating a spiritual value within man. "The new man lives in a new world because his outlook is changed; for the world we live in depends on our outlook."⁸

According to Paul:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:16-18).

Paul felt new within. He had gained a new point of view of himself and the world around him. He believed when one became a man in Christ, which is Paul's definition of a Christian, he did see life differently and he felt differently toward others. F. R. Barry speaks of the new place of people in these terms:

In Christ God has taken the initiative to overcome the moral contradiction between temporal history and the eternal goodness. God has entered history to save it, to claim sinful men for His service, to set them free from bondage and despair by the manifestation of His love towards them, to give them power to overcome evil, and to raise them up into a newness of life.⁹

⁸James Reid, "A New Creation: Exposition," in The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), X, 338.

⁹F. R. Barry, Recovery Of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 75.

God's purpose in Jesus Christ has been fulfilled. His instruction to those who have received the benefits of redemption and renewal are to create conditions in the world that will give the best opportunity for those who are in bondage in their human conditions. The spirit of the Gospel is to grant freedom to the political captives, freedom from poverty for the economically depressed, freedom from hunger for those who are suffering famine and malnutrition. The great redemption does not stop with a few. It is to be a grand redemption for all mankind, and to meet the varying needs of mankind which in any way are denied a full opportunity to live, to grow or to develop into the potential God has in mind for his creation. An actualization of human potentiality and spiritual salvation are available throughout life, including the period of aging. God never loses His concern for a person no matter how advanced the person's age may be. Life is timeless in the plan of God. The last hours of Christ's life were His greatest and most profound. It can be the same for any person at any age.

A THEOLOGY OF AGING

The Christian faith directly addresses the human experience of aging in that it focuses our attention on experiencing our temporal selves in the process of history and nature. The nature of contemporary theology as employed in this section of the paper is to correlate central classical symbols of the Judeo-Christian tradition with the experience of the process of aging, reflecting upon both the Judeo-Christian tradition and upon man's common experience of life from youth to aging. The central symbols of the Judeo-Christian tradition

bear intrinsic disclosive power for illuminating certain important dimensions of our common human experiences of the process of aging. Dr. David Tracy of the University of Chicago Divinity School shares this insight in the task of Christian theology:

. . . if indeed Christian theology is appropriately described as reflection upon both the meanings present in our common human experience and in the Christian tradition, then we may well turn to certain central symbols of the Christian tradition in order to see what questions and what answers may be offered in either our common human experience or in the Christian tradition. From there we may move specifically to certain central symbols of the Christian tradition in order to see what questions and what answers they may offer to the common human experience of aging, i.e., of experiencing our temporal selves in the process of history and nature.¹⁰

Nearly all psychotherapies or theories of personality attempt to give some interpretation or explanation of the stages of life and the personality factors characteristic of those stages. Believing that Christian theology also addresses those issues, using different symbols and perhaps with slightly different interpretations, we move from a theology of the person and proceed to create a theology of aging correlating central symbols of Creation, the Fall and Redemption with the life process of aging.

The doctrine of creation is first and foremost a reaffirmation about the sovereignty of God and the absolute dependence of all creatures. To say that Yahweh made the earth is to confess that it belongs to Him; He is the Lord (Psalm 24:1-2), (89:11). The Bible also speaks of the relationship between the Creator and his creation, a relationship which is essentially that of a covenant. Creation is

¹⁰David Tracy, "Eschatological Perspectives on Aging," in Seward Hiltner, Toward A Theology of Aging (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1975), p. 121.

the foundation of the covenant; it provides the setting within which Yahweh's saving work takes place.

In the creation stories in the Bible, man is assigned the highest place of all God's creatures. His special relationship to God is symbolized by the fact that his body has been given divine breath and has dominion over the animals. He is given a spiritual nature, being made in the image of God (Genesis 1,2). He is placed in a portion of the earth-wilderness which is converted into a garden for his sake. The creation of man, while not receiving a separate commendation, is included in the general statement: "God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:31)."

"The garden was planted after the creation of man. Man was placed in the garden to work it, not just to enjoy its luxury."¹¹ Man was driven from the garden on account of his disobedience because Eden symbolized the state of unbroken fellowship between God and man.

The story of Adam in the garden is not the story of one person, but the universal history of mankind. This is not a philosophy about man but the story of man's history in the light of God's revelation.

Correlating the human experience to Adam's life experience, we could safely say that the good life of youth, growing up into productive working years is similar in enjoyment, satisfaction and contentment to Adam's experience in the garden before the Fall. Adam, as the caretaker in the Garden of Eden is happily employed with income and expenses well in balance. He enjoys good health with his mate and

¹¹ Brevard S. Childs, "Garden of Eden," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), II, 23.

realizes the vigor of youth. Both feel the innocence of youth and thought nothing of their nakedness in the garden. Both enjoy each other for God planned that Adam would not be lonely and would enjoy the company of Eve. They both felt the protection of their creator and felt in harmony with their purpose of being alive.

We see great similarity between this state and that of childhood, youth, and even middle age. Children do have a certain innocence about them and are protected under the law until a later age. It is in the younger years that we enjoy the company of our friends and even up to middle age families enjoy living under one roof. It is in our adulthood that we learn the satisfaction of accomplishment of our labors and the financial benefits that are received in return which make for self-respect. The experience of life is one of challenge and for those under 65, work is not denied according to law. The days of the Garden before the Fall, are the days of childhood, youth and middle age, when there are no physical, legal or psychological limitations to enjoy life.

We understand the creation-fall narrative to help us realize the real nature of sin, or how mankind goes against his creator. We see in Adam a representation of all mankind in defiance against God's will. For Adam chooses his own will above the creator's will when he eats the one fruit he is forbidden to eat. This causes his ejection from the garden. We see in this case Adam symbolizing every human pretense over against his maker. We see man expressing his freedom of self-assertion. Sin takes place when man uses this freedom to measure himself against God, operating independently of his will, being a god unto himself acting according to his own wishes.

The Fall for modern man takes place when he rejects God's plan of human development which includes aging and death and in its place substitutes the worship of physical youthfulness. Modern Adam thinks he has a better plan for himself. He curses aging, disability, dependence and death. He is opposed to the final stage of aging after man enjoys youth and middle age. Modern Adam pretends he can remain youthful and rejects his own mortality. He even rejects other elderly for in their aging he sees his own mortality and future aging. Modern Adam wants to play God and not suffer any human limitations. In the rejection of the sovereignty of God he violates his own creation. In the refusal to accept his own aging, anxiety and frustration cloud his ability to face the reality of life and God's sacred plan. Angry, resentful and frustrated that the process cannot be changed he refuses to accept his own end of times and lives in the dream world of expensive health spas, plastic surgery and vitamin pills. Even after the most modern methods of medical science have been pursued, life continues to proceed to become old. To keep this from happening many people choose to commit suicide rather than suffer physical disability and the loss of independence. One third of all suicides in the United States are people who are over the age of sixty-five.

Americans have done much to deny their mortality. The dead are prepared to look youthful. They are placed in beautiful coffins and entombed in magnificent buildings where they are spoken of as residing. In this tradition we observe people denying their own death as well as expressing their sentiments over the death of a loved one.

For modern man to become elderly and less active in the community is a form of the Fall in his own eyes. When one has lived

so long that the body can no longer serve its master well, and becomes more of a problem than a blessing the Fall has happened. To live so long that one's spouse expires, with few friends nearby because they too have been outlived, the Fall of loneliness has happened. To finally live so long, that one outlives his savings and means of support and has to resort on the dependence of family for welfare, one has entered the Fall of the loss of self-respect. The end result of all this is that the tragedy of the garden experience is re-enacted. In man's desire for the good life, the rejection of the life process of aging and refusing to accept his own natural condition, man enters the real fall of Adam once again by seeking to be independent of his Creator's design of the natural plan, asserting himself through his own free will, measuring himself against God's will to try to provide a much better way of life created by himself. This is the enactment of Adam's act of sin all over again. The rejection of God, a denial of himself and a selection of a new and better man-made way is Adam's choice.

Even though man thinks his own way to life is better than his creator, God takes action to redeem man from his alienation, rejection and disillusionment. Man cannot save himself from the natural process. God takes new initiative by sharing in the human predicament through Jesus Christ. The letter to the Corinthians is one key to understanding what has happened:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (II Corinthians 5:16-19).

The redemptive plan of God includes finding renewal in life while one is growing older in the life process. Paul, with many others found a renewing spiritual experience in Jesus Christ. He reports that people even feel differently about themselves. They do not regard Jesus from a human point of view, neither do they regard themselves from a human point of view. There has been an obvious change in their thinking, about themselves and the life process. By accepting Jesus Christ as Lord, the early Christians found themselves enjoying and rejoicing in the feeling of being a new creation. The old way of looking at life, and looking at one another and themselves, was greatly changed through Jesus Christ who came to reconcile mankind to God and God's way for the human life process.

In the redeeming process of Jesus Christ, the aging, instead of resenting time running out, learn a new appreciation for time. Time, because it is seen as a limited quantity and something that is not going to last forever, is more valued and is even used more thoughtfully. Time is not taken for granted as it is in the earlier years of life.

A more satisfying resolution is found among those elderly who begin to emphasize the quality of the present time remaining rather than the quantity. When death becomes imminent there tends to be a sense of immediacy, of here and now, of living in the moment.¹²

A second redeeming quality of aging that is learned in the new being of retirement is the new opportunity for leisure and the development of avocations. Accepted is the fact that one does not suddenly dream up an avocation or a hobby at the age of retirement. Retirement

¹²Robert Butler, Why Survive, Being Old in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 409.

is an extension of the life that has been lived for years. Some people cannot handle new leisure at retirement age because they have not prepared for it in previous moments. Self-reliance, pleasure, meaning and contemplation cannot suddenly be invented at 60 or 65. They have to be fleshed out during the earlier years. Still, the spirit of the "new outlook" on life is to be creative and to make interesting use of the free time at hand.

The new being can find a third redeeming feature in aging. It provides an opportunity to withdraw, to take a longer look at life and past experiences. New wisdom is gained. Philosophical maturity is learned and awarded to that person who contemplates within, accepting this final stage of life as a gift of God and not punishment for past errors. The experience of self-acceptance, not denial of the physical conditions of the mind and body grants a peace that passes our human understanding.

The new being or Christian person who has accepted the final days of life as a gift can appreciate retirement from work as an act of physical conservation. For some people have suffered illnesses for having worked beyond the years of proper physical capability.

Paul declares in Romans 5:3, "Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God." The new being in Jesus Christ who chooses not to deny the end of years, can receive as a gift a sense of hopefulness which endures through physical or psychological setbacks in the last years. When a person is a new being in Christ, he not only accepts the present for what it is but he is also able to be future oriented:

From an eschatological reference point, Jurgen Moltmann challenges the conventional idea of revolution, renewal, and reform. As "re" turns to a previous state of affairs from which the world is presumed to have fallen, these represent a past orientation. As a replay of what has been, they are not open to the future. In the place of revolution, Moltmann puts 'provolution,' a genuine openness to the not yet, a yearning for the new world God will bring, one which now we can only see through a glass darkly.¹³

The person of Paul was open to a "provolutionary" concept of life, open to new possibilities and had a yearning for the new world in Christ. The old life of the past is no longer desired. He looked for the new and found it. This "provolutionary" concept is one which permits aging to be a redeeming experience and is perhaps even a requirement if one is going to enjoy growth, adventure, and creative fulfillment in the final years.

A final redeeming experience for those who are willing to accept God's plan and process of aging is that of revelation through faith. Revealed is the confidence of life after death on earth. Death is recognized as another step in the process in life. Death is therefore not an enemy but a friend, a means to exit this life to enter the next life. Just as previous stages of life were not feared, neither does this stage of death-life need to be feared, for it is all a part of the ongoingness of life. This can be a realized value through faith in the life process.

Dr. Roland Bainton, Professor at Yale University Divinity School was asked the question, "Do you believe there is an afterlife?" His answer was, "I don't know. My father said to me, 'the only way to find out is to die.' It would be wonderful to have reunions.

¹³Gabriel Fackre, Word In Deed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 72.

We talk about the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is stilled but these are images, we can't pin it down."¹⁴ It is obvious Dr. Bainton did not feel he had many answers to the question of death and the afterlife, but there is a certain confidence in the future that permits him to speak of death and not be afraid. It is an example of Christian hope.

Jesus said to his friends:

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (John 14:1-3).

Jesus gave a deep assurance to his followers that God has plans for life continuing beyond the vision of man. God must be trusted and his plan accepted. The new Adam uses his freedom to fulfill the will of God.

The Christian is not afraid to acknowledge that his own physical death is inevitable. He views it as another human experience to be deeply involved in. He is optimistic and hopeful about the event because he counts on God's faithfulness. He has some measure of God's concern for his human events because Jesus Christ has given a feeling of accountability to God the Father. God can be trusted and He can be measured as one who cares what human beings go through, simply because Jesus came and taught and exemplified the love of God.

The faith that man's life is under God and saved by Jesus Christ despite human sin is based upon the conviction about God's steadfastness in both past and present, may be averred about the shape or form of any life that may exist beyond the fact of death? I see

¹⁴Arthur S. Freese, "I Believe," Modern Maturity, XIX:6 (January 1977), 44.

no answer to this question save in the beginning form of agnosticism, namely, in admitting that we do not know. But it is even more important that we realize that our faith demands our acceptance of not knowing as an appropriate condition and not a frustration. This is the point at which courage moves from faith to hope without any need to assert such teachings as the natural immortality of disembodied soul, which Christian faith must deny.¹⁵

The nature of faith is to believe without seeing and to accept without absolutely knowing. When the Christian views the end of life with this kind of faith, a certain expectation of realized hope filters into the outlook on the inevitable experience of death revealing it need not be feared, it is not the end and it is part of God's plan. Whatever God has planned, the Christian knows it shall be good for him.

God has a great plan for man in the life process. When man can trust God and the plan, and accept his own mortality, the last years of life on earth can be as joyful as the first. The Christian strives for the "child-like" quality of faith, for he remembers, "unless ye become as little children, ye shall not enter therein."

¹⁵Hiltner, Theological Dynamics, p. 151.

CHAPTER III

AREAS OF SERVICE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

To prepare for retirement takes a lifetime, for retirement is but an extension of our whole lives. Jennie Swerdlow, a 68 year old Russian immigrant, three times married, and three times widowed, expresses it best:

It's not exactly what you do when you're past 65, its what you did all your life that matters. If you've lived a full life, developed your mind, you'll be able to use it past 65. Let the young people put that in their soup and eat it.¹

That being the case, we can say the church has been helping people to prepare to retire for many years and this subject is not new for the church. But if we consider preparation for retirement as a specialized study for people near to retirement and also after, we are talking about something else.

People are seldom ready for abrupt changes in life. We put off looking at the future when it holds such prospects. Hence, people are not ordinarily ready for retirement, because they put off what they do not wish to acknowledge. People need encouragement to acknowledge retirement when it is near. They need to plan for the day of severe cutback in their income, plus the psychological ramifications of the event. Retirement is one experience in life the church can help people to be ready for if it is willing to make the effort. The church ordinarily includes those people who are "natural

¹Mark J. Harris, "How To Make It To 100," New West Magazine, II:1 (January 1977), 1.

instructors" for the retirement experience. It includes those people who can advise others who have to live with fewer years, lesser income, government support, eternal questions and tentative health. The church must seriously look at this due to the increased number of the aging, not only in the present but even more so in the future. The church is not only called to serve the aging but to change how people feel about the aging process. Any negative feeling about this process is only a rejection of what will happen to themselves.

A COURSE ON "PLANNING YOUR RETIREMENT CAREER"

The following pages of this section present both content to be covered and a procedure that might be used by a local church in meeting the need for pre-retirement training. A ten session course for persons who have retired or are near to retirement is here outlined and then expanded as a guide for the leader. For those sessions in which an invited specialist is suggested, there is only a brief discussion of the content such a person might present.

First Session

What is retirement?

- A. How society views retirement.
- B. The effects of retirement on the individual.
- C. The Judeo-Christian view of aging.
- D. Opportunities for community service by the retiree.

Though the minister need not be the instructor of the course, s/he should be present for the first session at least, to explain points C and D. The instructor introduces the course by presenting

retirement as a career, a life experience which has demands, goals, expectations just as earlier phases of life before retirement. One must establish a retirement program which has within it road markers that one must pass if retirement is to be a success. The truth is, many fail at successful retirement.

Society has a negative view of aging, retirement and growing old. The instructor should ask each individual in the class how she or he feels about retirement. The class is invited to create a statement about how they feel as a group getting ready to retire. The instructor shares with the class different ways retirement has affected people. The people who have denied the idea of retirement in their lives do not do as well as the people who have accepted the idea and have made emotional as well as physical preparation for the experience. Hence, some people are challenged to make this period of their lives exciting while others only become depressed for long periods of time, looking back upon the past.

The minister by using various scriptures from the Old and New Testaments can remind the class how the Judeo-Christian tradition values human life, from childhood to aging. This is important since we live in a culture which over-values its youth. Dr. Brand Blanchard, Professor Emeritus of Yale University and author of many books, states the problem clearly:

The fact is that youth in this country, charming and enviable as it is, is overvalued. In America youth has an aura around it; if you don't believe it, look at the cigarette ads, where young love in green glades confers its daily benediction on nicotine. The result is that America is an odd place to retire in. It is a young people's culture in an increasingly old people's country. There are more than 22 million of us who are over 65. At the turn of the century we were 4 percent of the population; we are

now 10 percent. By the middle of the next century we are expected to be above 25 percent. These are facts that we have not digested or provided for. We must learn how to put to better use the 15 to 20 years that follow 65.²

Regarding point "D", the minister can be most helpful by reflecting on the spirit of service found in Matthew 16:24. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The minister can then present a list of agencies and projects in the community which are in need of volunteer help, especially those which are church related. The minister can also refer to members of the congregation who are happy in retirement, and who in some good measure are living meaningful lives through volunteer community service.

Second Session

Physiological Aspects of Retirement

1. Maintenance of good health
2. Coping with limitations such as strokes, etc.

The instructor invites doctors and nutritionists who have had experience in geriatric centers and homes for the elderly. These people are ordinarily most qualified to speak on the subject of the physiological process of aging. Good health and sound aging go hand in hand. Dr. Robert Butler advises:

Changes will therefore occur in our definition of the aging process itself. Much of what we think of as aging today is actually disease and illness, and not a part of fundamental physical aging. This includes many of the physical, mental and emotional conditions seen in older people. The major diseases of late life

²M. C. Small, "Small World," Senior World, V:1 (January 1977), 9.

may become preventable or at least treatable. The mental depressions of late life and the acute brain syndromes are already treatable and reversible.³

Nutritional information is important to the aging who have to be concerned with their diet. Studies indicate that the elderly who are not sick need exactly the same foods as other people, although in slightly less quantity if they are not strenuously active, and they have the same vitamin deficiencies as are seen in the global population.⁴

There are many things that the elderly can do to insure good health. It is most important to eat a well-balanced diet, keep weight within reasonable limits, and make physical activities a regular part of life. Cities which have an Arthritis Foundation have very good books on exercising. The elderly should try to pace themselves in daily activities and should not try to do too much in one day. And finally, it is essential to get a physical and dental examination one or more times a year.

Third Session

Psychological and Emotional Aspects of Retirement
in Adjustment to:

- A. Change
- B. Life cycles
- C. Changed family relationships
- D. The possibility of a single life

³Robert Butler, Why Survive, Being Old In America (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 17.

⁴Alex Comfort, A Good Age (New York: Crown, 1976), p. 91.

A successful planned retirement career depends on the ability of a person to adjust to change and to feel good about life in the midst of a changing life cycle experience. If a person does not have an ability to be flexible within him or herself, the change to a new stage of retirement may be a most difficult period in life. A noted marriage and family counselor, Dr. Smiley Blanton, offers this view:

Few human failings cause as much unhappiness as the inability to change in the face of change, to modify primitive, selfish desires when they conflict with the welfare or happiness of others, to accept new ideas when they are good ideas. And yet a great many people lose this sort of elasticity as they move on in years. Sometimes the degree of rigidity is almost unbelievable.⁵

Retirement is an extension of our earlier years. If a person has a difficult time adjusting to new situations as a child or a young adult, unless the problem has been worked out in middle age, the retirement years will be difficult as well. It is a matter of elasticity and also imagination. Some people do not stretch as well as others. Flexibility is one of the great requirements for a satisfactory retirement experience.

We live our lives in stages or phases. These are spoken of as life cycles. It was Erik Erikson who began to make the life-cycle a clear and popular concept with his first book Childhood and Society, in 1950. Erik Erikson constructed a chart showing life unfolding in observable sequence. Each stage was marked as a crucial period of increased vulnerability and also heightened potential. At such points achievements are won or failures occur, leaving the future to some degree better or worse but in any case, reconstructed. It is good

⁵Smiley Blanton, Now Or Never (New York: Guideposts, 1959), p. 49.

for the members of the class to understand that life goes through cycles and moves from stage to stage. At certain critical stages life requires a special awareness and effort to make achievement or a successful adjustment. This approach to the matter of retirement may be seen in a more objective way by identifying the human process of their own lives more completely. Members of the class are encouraged to share their own feelings regarding the transition they are going through. Dr. Paul W. Pruyser suggests that the following areas are especially crucial: the loss of dignity which results from questioning self, self-regard while fumbling for some concept of self, coping with the loss of work which in the past has provided its own financial support system, coping with a sense of loss of independence, and coping with a sense of loss of time, a feeling that time is running out.⁶ All of these require some adjustment and rethinking if they are to be handled successfully.

On the other hand, the newly retired will find in the new stage of retirement several positive experiences which become helpful in making the adjustment. These are: the gradual discovery of some good and wholesome dependencies, the value of redefining one's own status, living with freed up energies to seek and create work, accepting different kinds of responsibilities which give personal satisfaction, the relaxation of defenses, living in the present instead of rushing into the future and the urge to identify with the idealism of youth with

⁶Paul W. Pruyser, "Aging: Downward, Upward, or Forward?", in Seward Hiltner, Toward A Theology of Aging (New York: Human Science Press, 1975), p. 108.

a new freedom to reveal one's inmost thoughts.⁷ All of these can be of help to seniors in transition.

As life cycles change, relationships within the family change. We are speaking for example of the children now seeing themselves as adults and feeling the need to give more advice to the elderly parent. Though parents might not appreciate this concern from the children, it is normal for loving children to want to be of help and to assume this responsibility.

One of the most difficult personal matters to adjust to is the loss of a husband or a wife after many years of a meaningful companionship in marriage. Loneliness is one of the great problems of the aging after a loved one has died. People must be active in the community if they are going to successfully deal with the matter of loneliness.

A concluding observation for this session might be summarized this way:

1. Don't let your attitudes harden like cement.
2. Don't anchor yourself to the past.
3. Don't be a hypochondriac.
4. Don't ever retire if you can help it. (Boredom can literally kill you)
5. Don't give in to loneliness. Next to health, loneliness is probably the most terrifying aspect of old age.
6. Try not to be afraid of death, it is but the closing of a door and the opening of a new one.

These positive attitudes are helpful: 1) Try to keep your capacity for wonder. 2) Keep on being creative. 3) Keep trying new things. 4) Keep in touch with people. 5) Develop a philosophy of life. 6) Be yourself. As Hans Selye says, 'most emotional stress is caused by trying to be something you are not.' In your later years, at least, you should know what you are and have the courage to be it.⁸

⁷Paul W. Pruyser, "Aging: Downward, Upward, or Forward?", in Seward Hiltner, Toward A Theology Of Aging (New York: Human Science Press, 1975), p. 112.

⁸Blanton, pp. 253-264.

Fourth Session

Satisfying Use of Leisure Time

- A. Hobbies and special interest groups
- B. Education programs
- C. Travel opportunities

This session emphasizes being creative and involved in life.

Writing in the March, 1974, issue of Psychology Today, Paul Baltes and K. Warner Schaie report that in their opinion:

General intellectual decline in old age is a myth . . . Our findings challenge the stereotyped view, and promote a more optimistic one. We have discovered that the old man's boast, 'I'm just as good as I ever was,' may be true, after all.

They wrote their article under the title "The Myth of the Twilight Years."⁹

The interests and hobbies of the retired are only an extension of past years. Each person needs to be challenged to grow throughout life in many different ways, intellectually as well as occupationally.

At this session those who are members of the church congregation who are succeeding in retirement activities should be invited to present their projects to the class. It would be an encouragement to others to start projects of their own. People who have slides of vacation trips could be invited to encourage others to begin to think of planning a trip. A travel agent could be invited to explain different travel plans that are low cost and interesting for senior adults.

⁹Reuel L. Howe, How to Stay Younger While Growing Older (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1974), p. 150.

In metropolitan communities, there are many adult educational opportunities. The public schools, community colleges and state universities offer educational extension programs that are outstanding. Many times they are offered in neighborhoods where they are very accessible. The Adult Division of the San Diego Community Colleges in cooperation with Catholic Community Service offers weekly educational and social experiences. They follow this free weekly program each Wednesday at their Continuing Educational Center For Older Adults, which is "open to all ages, 55 (more or less)":

- 10:00 - Stretching exercises
- 10:30 - Bingo
- 11:15 - Special Interest Time
 - Oil Painting, Dancing, Oral History Discussion
- 12:00 - Hot soup for lunch
- 12:30 - Sing along
- 1:00 - Special program

People need to be encouraged to participate in various activities taking place in the community. They will continue to be conducted only as long as people attend them. If they are not offered in communities where there are a number of senior adults, then various organizations in the community should consider sponsoring activities in behalf of senior adults. The local church can take the lead in such a concern. People are inclined to live where they can be happy, and to stay happy is to stay busy and creative.

Fifth Session

Your New Career

- A. Making your avocation profitable
- B. Part time employment

In many cases people need to work to supplement their social security. In other cases, people choose to have some part time job to keep good mental health. This session is devoted to activities which will provide not only something to do, but will provide a small income as well. Businessmen and women from the church congregation could be invited to take part in presenting the program. People who are retired and are conducting a successful part time business could be invited to tell of their work and experience.

Sixth Session

Income During Retirement

- A. Social Security
- B. Private income and pensions
- C. Public assistance programs
- D. Investments

People who have managed their lives well in the retirement years should be invited into the group to explain their system. They can explain the national as well as state medical assistance programs, naming the doctors who are most cooperative with seniors and medical insurance programs. Sound budget planning is necessary. This being so, several budgets can be presented to the class for study and discussion.

Seventh Session

Housing

- A. Evaluation of present home
- B. Specialized housing

C. Facilities for specialized care

D. New concepts of hospitalization for the terminally ill

An interesting thing often occurs to people who are retiring. They feel they must do something dramatic to meet the new social vocational condition of their lives. Some people feel they must move from their present home as one way of cutting back on expenses without a proper plan of action. An evaluation of all conditions should be made before new plans are laid. These should include housing, health, family ties, and special services for seniors. The class should consider taking a tour of different kinds of housing in the community, such as Federal housing for seniors, mobile homes and apartment living (private), and also intermediate care facilities and nursing homes for the invalid. Such facilities usually welcome groups interested in their facilities. When seniors learn that a new place to live does not automatically bring the happiness they seek, they have learned something important.

The Hospice Home Care program is a new concept in serving those who are terminally ill. It seeks to give to the patient the opportunity to make decisions about how the caring process will be carried out. The patient is given the advantage of making choices that are most comfortable to him or her. Hospice, whose general offices are in New Haven, Connecticut, is supported financially by the National Cancer Institute. The Hospice goals are (1) to keep the patient at home as long as possible, (2) to supplement, not duplicate, existing services, (3) to educate health care professionals and the public, (4) to support the entire family as the unit of care, (5) to help the patient to live as fully as possible, (6) to keep costs down.

The national organization is quite small, including three physicians. Hospice continues to offer four categories of service; full-scope service, consultation with relatives, consultation with physicians on symptom control, consultation with nurses on patient/family management. Several cities now have a Hospice office with volunteer medical and social workers. Thirteen different groups existed in California in January, 1977.

Eighth Session

Legal Aspects of Retirement Years

- A. Wills
- B. Taxes
- C. Trusts

This session is one which is best led by a lawyer and a banker. Laws are different across the country. As people move from city to city it is well to become acquainted with laws regarding wills, taxes, and trusts in that state.

Ninth Session

The Final Days

- A. Dying with dignity and a living will
- B. Is death to be feared?
- C. Is there life after life?

The State Law of California now permits a person to decide whether s/he will want to use life sustaining apparatus at a time near death. Many people avoid this decision, hence the family is uninstructed as to what to do for the family member who is terminally

ill. Various problems of serious nature are the result. Many people have chosen to make a "living will" or a legal directive to physicians.

Here is one example:

Directive made this _____ day of _____, 19____. I, _____ being of sound mind, willfully, and voluntarily make known my desire that my life shall not be artificially prolonged under the circumstances set forth below, do hereby declare:

1. If at any time I should have an incurable injury, disease, or illness certified to be a terminal condition by two (2) physicians, and where the application of life-sustaining procedures would serve only to artificially prolong the moment of my death and where my physician determines that my death is imminent whether or not life-sustaining procedures are utilized, I direct that such procedures be withheld or withdrawn, and that I be permitted to die naturally.

2. In the absence of my ability to give directions regarding the use of such life sustaining procedures, it is my intention that this directive shall be honored by my family and physicians as the final expression of my legal right to refuse medical or surgical treatment and accept the consequences from such refusal.

3. If I have been diagnosed as pregnant and that diagnosis is known to my physician, this directive shall have no force or effect during the course of my pregnancy.

4. I have been diagnosed and notified at least 14 days ago as having a terminal condition by _____ M.D., whose address is _____, and whose telephone number is _____. I understand that if I have not filled in the physician's name and address, it shall be presumed that I did not have a terminal condition when I made out this directive.

5. This directive shall have no force or effect five (5) years from the date filled in above.

6. I understand the full import of this directive and I am emotionally and mentally competent to make this directive.

Signed _____. Residing at _____. The declarant has been personally known to me and I believe him/her to be of sound mind. _____ residing at _____. _____, residing at _____.

The following two items, which are the last in the program, require the minister of the local church to be present, for these should be handled in the Judeo-Christian spiritual framework. The first is, "Is death to be feared?" The minister is to sensitively draw out into the open, the different feelings and thoughts about death held by the members of the class. He must learn if someone is really having a problem with this last phase of life on earth. If the problem is

severe, if there is deep fear, the minister should be alerted to the fact that personal counseling should take place after the last session of the course. Death, when presented as part of the life process and necessary for new life to take place, can be most helpful. Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has written an outstanding book entitled, On Death and Dying. It should be read by every member of the class and discussed at the final session. People as a rule experience two kinds of crisis in the human death experience. The first is the acceptance of one's own death, and the other is the acceptance of a loved one's death. Dr. Kubler-Ross, a psychiatrist, explains in her book that people pass through clearly defined stages in reconciling themselves to death. The five stages¹⁰ are: (1) "Denial"--a "no, not me" attitude. This is a typical reaction when a patient learns that s/he is terminally ill. "Denial," says Dr. Ross, "is important and necessary." It helps cushion the impact of the patient's awareness that death is inevitable. (2) "Rage and anger," asking "Why me?" The patient resents the fact that others will remain healthy and alive while he or she must die. God is a special target for anger, since He is regarded as imposing, arbitrarily, the death sentence. To those who are shocked at her claim that such anger is not only permissible but inevitable, Dr. Kubler-Ross replies, "God can take it." (3) "Bargaining" expressed as, "Yes me, but. . ." Patients accept the fact of death but strike bargains for more time. Mostly they bargain with God--even among people who never talked with God before. (4) "Depression,"--or "Yes, me." First, the

¹⁰Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, On Death and Dying (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 38.

person mourns past losses, things not done, wrongs committed. But then he or she enters a state of preparatory grief, getting ready for the arrival of death. The patient grows quiet, doesn't want visitors.

"When a dying patient doesn't want to see you any more," says Dr.

Kubler-Ross, "this is a sign he has finished his unfinished business with you and it is a blessing. He can now let go peacefully." (5)

"Acceptance," or "My time is very close now and it's all right." This final stage is not a happy stage, but neither is it unhappy. It is devoid of feelings, but it is not resignation. It is really a victory.

The final subject of the session comes from the book, Is There Life After Life, by Dr. Raymond Moody. He is now writing a sequel, Reflections On Life After Life, scheduled for spring, 1977, publication. Dr. Moody is a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia Hospital. He has conducted an ongoing study of 150 cases of people who have experienced "clinical death" and who then have been revived and have lived to tell what happened to them while they were supposedly dead. Their near death experiences, as recounted by Dr. Moody, have a number of similar qualities which have a way of taking the sting and the fear out of a supposedly unknown event. The people who are interviewed speak of their death experience as an unfrightening, natural, pleasant, and ideal experience. "Despite the wide variation in the circumstances surrounding close calls with death and in the types of persons undergoing them, there is a striking similarity among the accounts of the experiences themselves."

Even though these accounts differ somewhat, Moody constructs a brief, "ideal" experience which embodies elements which commonly appear.

A man is dying. As he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He now begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time feels himself moving rapidly through a long, dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside his own physical body, and sees his own body from a distance, as though he were a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point. He notices that he still has a "body," but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind.

Soon others come to meet and help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have died. A loving, warm spirit--a being of light--appears before him. This being asks him a question non-verbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him an instantaneous play-back of the major events of his life.

At some point he finds himself approaching a sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.¹¹

It is very possible that some members of the class will have had an experience similar to those mentioned in Dr. Moody's book. The purpose for including this information in the final session is to remove fear from the idea of death, and to put in its place a feeling of life process. It is consistent with the God of Jesus Christ, who is a good and gracious God who, according to our Christian faith, has planned for the continuation of life after death.

Tenth Session

- A. Man's Search For Meaning
- B. Man's Desire For Meaningful Expression
- C. Reality and Ecstasy

¹¹ Raymond A. Moody, Life After Life (Covington, GA: Mockingbird Books, 1976).

The purpose of this session is to achieve greater spiritual awareness. It should be led by a member of the clergy who is acquainted with materials that throw new light and thought upon a religious and social approach to life. Robert Leslie of Pacific School of Religion writes:

Though the search for meaning in our time is often not identified in religious terms, I take the position in this book that any search for meaning in life is a search for God--even though God may never be mentioned.¹²

The creator seeks out people to invigorate their souls, their thoughts and their imaginations. The Spirit comes to disturb people in their comfortable beds, their lounge chairs and their nicely patterned lives. People become angry when they are disturbed in their comfortable ruts and hence do not give way to questioning and searching easily. Other times, people will wake up out of a sound sleep and search throughout a library for a single poem or story.

Viktor Frankl believes the meaning of our existence is not invented by ourselves, but rather detected. He reports:

One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it.

As each situation in life represents a challenge to man and presents a problem for him to solve, the question of the meaning of life may actually be reversed. Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible.¹³

¹²Robert Leslie, Man's Search For A Meaningful Faith (Nashville: Graded Press, 1967), p. 12.

¹³Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search For Meaning (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), p. 172.

Man not only searches for meaning in life, but he searches for ways of meaningful expression. There is something in people which seeks to come out of the creative capacity of man to match the great land and sea scapes. It seeks to express the beauty in a flower or a tree. The class should be invited to share with each other in small groups the inner wishes or secret desires that have yet to be fulfilled. Since that day is now here, the group should help one another to plan how that dream of expression could come true. Many creative talents are locked up within the individual and need to be encouraged to come out into the open. Many elderly have started late in their lives to develop a great career. The creative spirit within looks for a chance to be expressed.

The basic idea of section C comes from the book entitled Reality and Ecstasy by Harvey Seifert. He offers:

Seeing ourselves for what we really are and responding to a view of the larger whole is the avenue to human ecstasy. Reality and ecstasy are likely to be unique emphases distinguishing the religion of the next decades partly because the most thorough satisfaction, wonder, and delight are possible only if they are based on what dependably exists. The word 'ecstasy' is here used to refer to experiences of deep satisfaction and joy and well being . . . If life seems dreary and boring, we have not become authentic human beings open to the whole of reality. Religion adds festive celebration, with color, dance, bells, and banners. These experiences of the whole person, based both on cognitive insight and emotional feeling, erupt into life with powerful impact, drawing the recipient out of his former self into a new level of existence.¹⁴

The person coming into the new stage of retirement needs both reality and ecstasy. He needs to be aware of the reality of his own existence and be convinced that there is ecstasy to be found in

¹⁴Harvey Seifert, Reality And Ecstasy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 87.

retirement. We are never too old for self-discovery, unity with reality and the experience of a close relationship with another person especially by being helpful. The crowning ecstasy of all is communion with God to find the totality of reality with others in community.¹⁵

SPECIAL STUDIES FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

People must be able to communicate, especially if they are going to pass through different stages of life successfully. Reuel L. Howe points out the importance of dialogue:

Every man is a potential adversary, even those whom we love. Only through dialogue are we saved from this enmity toward one another. Dialogue is to love, what blood is to the body. When the flow of blood stops, the body dies. When dialogue stops, love dies and resentment and hate are born. But dialogue can restore a dead relationship. Indeed, this is the miracle of dialogue; it can bring relationship into being once again, a relationship that has died.¹⁶

One's ability to communicate or to dialogue is so vital to happy, successful years of retirement it should be a talent that is always improved upon. Remembering that loneliness is one of the major reasons for depression and discouragement in retirement years, the local church should consider a program in communication skills which would help people improve this important endeavor.

The responsibility of the Church is to speak dialogically with each generation and thus meet the needs of men. And the Church's own need for renewal is met through such dialogue.¹⁷

¹⁵Harvey Seifert, Reality And Ecstasy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 89-95.

¹⁶Reuel L. Howe, The Miracle of Dialogue (New York: Seabury Press, 1965), p. 3.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 14

The experience for dialogue, for honest communication between leader and laity, and between laypersons also, must be considered a vital experience in the life and members and friends of the church. Dr. Browne Barr has found in his own church experience that regular and normal interaction of people of all ages and sexes, where each accepts the other as persons is an ideal environment for the exercise of all human capacities. He has found the local church is ideally situated for that teaming up and also for the delight and surprise of intergenerational affairs which can often be a prelude to more profound mutual appreciation.¹⁸

It is important for people to improve their ability to communicate regardless of their age. Each age has its demands and pressures. To cope with these, people must move from being monological to dialogical in their communication. The monologic person fails in communication though many words are said, for others exist to serve and confirm him or her. Looking for a confirmation of his/her own feelings h/she does not hear or feel the words and needs of another person. This leads to loneliness and eventual psychological isolation. Dialogue is that address and response between persons where there is a flow of meaning between them. Loneliness is dissolved when people can enter into a dialogical relationship of sharing and hearing, relating and listening to one another.

Programs should not only be offered to help people to communicate with others, but also to stay abreast of their world and not fall

¹⁸Browne Barr, The Well Church Book (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 12.

behind. The world of yesteryear is interesting as long as it can be related to the present time and its new challenges. The elderly feel part of the community when they relate themselves to the problems and concerns that others face in the community. People need to live in the present and be challenged to struggle for a better future.

The Mission Hills-First Congregational Church of San Diego invited adults of all ages in both church and community to participate in such an education program for study and dialogue. The course descriptions offered were:

A. Getting In Touch With Our Feelings And Religious Beliefs
A small group (8 to 12 persons) meeting once a week for 6 to 8 weeks to examine, discuss and evaluate our religious convictions, feelings and doubts. (led by a pastor)

B. Effective Parenting Or Parent Effectiveness Training
This workshop studies the role of parents, modeling how values are learned. Length, 4 to 6 weeks. Led by trained P.E.T. leader.

C. Transactional Analysis (T.A.)
Discussion of the general principles of Transactional Analysis. Group gathers for four weeks to discuss the basic ideas of T.A. and how they relate to our daily experience. (Conducted by pastor trained in T.A.)

D. Marriage Enrichment
This workshop concentrates on enriching and enhancing relatively stable marriages. It is not intended to be group therapy for marriages in jeopardy. Limited to 4 to 8 couples. It meets once a week for six weeks and is led by the pastor trained in marital counseling.

E. Getting In Touch With Our Feelings
Using games and simulations individuals will become more aware of their emotional responses to inter-personal relations and will be provided some guidelines for coping with feelings. Open to people of all ages. Group meets once a week for 5 weeks. Limited to 20 people. Led by the pastor.

F. Communication
A six week workshop of no more than 18 people will discuss verbal and non-verbal communication processes, use of body language, etc. Led by the pastor.

G. How I Get My Human Needs Satisfied

(G) Limited to 12 people of any age who will meet once a week for six weeks to examine Maslov's hierarchy of needs and how they relate to each of us. Led by the pastor.

H. Conflict Management Seminar

A small group of 10 to 15 people will discuss conflicts we encounter in daily experiences in our community, work, home, club, school, church, etc., and examine ways in which conflicts may be managed or resolved. Eight sessions. Led by a pastor trained in conflict management.

I. Bible Study Course

This group meets every Sunday morning after the regular church service for 50 minutes examining the different books and themes in the Bible. Led by the pastor.

J. Mid-week Morning Study Group

This group studies outstanding books dealing with Christian faith and human behavior, meeting weekly throughout the school year and led by the pastor. Study books are suggested by the members of the group. One and one-half hours in length.

People at any age need encouragement to improve in their ability to relate to other people. Just as the church feels the responsibility to teach the Bible, so must it feel the responsibility to teach methods of communication. Dr. Sherod Miller, one of the authors of the book studied in the communications seminar points out:

Almost everyone is talking about improving relationships these days, and for good reason. Relationships give life a depth of meaning provided by few other human experiences. They offer the potential for enormous gain in a person's individual growth and enjoyment of life. At the same time, they may--and perhaps too often do--hinder growth and enjoyment of life.¹⁹

It has become observable to those who work with people in interpersonal relationship group studies, that young adults find it less difficult to attend and participate. Middle aged and senior adults appear to be more reluctant to enroll and take part. Yet, once senior adults and the middle-aged take part, they enjoy the process of better

¹⁹Sherod Miller, Alive And Aware (Minneapolis: Interpersonal Communications Programs, 1975), p. 11.

communication just as much as people of other ages. This might suggest to us that older people are inclined to accept matters as they are and to continue in patterns they have followed all their lives. Younger people believe there is still time and need for a change in the way they conduct their own relationships. A most beautiful experience takes place when people of all ages enter into a study-discussion group regarding their interpersonal relationships, for they are of great help to each other.

Adult education is one of the most rapidly growing industries and is carried on by colleges, schools, and community organizations of various kinds. Many of these adult classes are offered in the day time as well as in the evening. The metropolitan areas offer more in educational programs than small communities.

The area of interest in which skills can be learned are: communication, including personal and technological; some area of human relations, such as personal growth, marriage, working with the disadvantaged, personal relationships, etc.; community affairs and action; arts and crafts, hobbies, new forms of exercise especially those suitable to physical changes that accompany growing older. We can try to get in touch with the needs, talents, and interests that are in us and search for the skill that we need to actualize our potential.²⁰

When it is possible, the church and other educational institutions in the community should try to cooperate in creating a well rounded educational experience for the people in the community. Leaders of institutions in the community must be able to communicate with each other on the matter for the benefit of all.

²⁰Howe, How To Stay Younger, p. 133.

EDUCATION FOR THE ADULT CHILD

The fifth commandment still has great meaning for our time. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you." (Exodus 20:12) We recall this commandment since it sets the tone of responsibility children are to have for their parents and one generation is to have for another.

Though we see loved ones growing older through the years, it is difficult to grasp the fact that the strong, protective hands that could handle almost anything, now need assistance to make adjustment to new stages of life.

Not all aging is the same. Children meet the needs of aging parents in different ways. Some children do not accept enough responsibility for their parents and other children accept too much.²¹

The fact of the matter is that ordinarily children of aging parents are not ready to give assistance to their parents as efficiently as they could. Hence, the church is able to care for the aging indirectly when it provides a learning experience for the "adult child" to care for aging parents as they should be cared for. Adult children need guidance in this matter since, even with the best intentions they can succeed in making a delicate situation a tragic one.

Dealing fairly and intelligently with aging parents requires great skill, tact, and self honesty. We must always keep in mind the psychiatric truth that where our parents are concerned we have an ambivalent attitude: we love them, but we also resent them.²²

²¹Blanton, p. 236.

²²Ibid.

Dr. Blanton reminds us that there are certain hidden feelings involved that can play havoc in making plans with and for elderly parents. Elderly parents do need help in making important decisions regarding their housing, health and emotional stability, but offering too much can create a loss of trust and ill feeling in the last years. In order to avoid such unfortunate consequences the adult child needs help in dealing with needs of parents. The actions they take with their parents are matters they are going to have to live with the rest of their lives. In order to protect and to provide for the aging in their later years, and to sustain and guide children who must live with the problems of aging parents and the decisions they make for their parents in their later years, the church should consider offering a study course on the subject, "Being A Responsible Adult Child."

A course outline is therefore suggested.

First Session

- I. Getting to know one another (to establish an atmosphere of family together).
 - A. What are the concerns of the members of the class?
 - B. Getting to know one another's problems with aging parents.
- II. Understanding the steps in aging. The chronological age alone tells us little about an older person. More important is a person's stage of aging.²³
 - A. The Anticipation Period. This period is both positive and

²³Adapted from Dorothy Hill Larsen, Four Stages of Aging (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1966), p. 65.

negative. It should be a time of preparation and is too often a time of denial of reality.

- B. Freewheeling Period. During this period the person is still active, is able to make his/her own decisions and to take care of financial matters. By this time he/she does have some physical limitations.
- C. Sitting Period. This period finds the person frail with marked slowing down and doing very little. There is a noticeable decrease in sensory areas (sight, hearing, taste, smell). He/she is still able to make decisions, but takes more time in doing so. Often this period is seven to eight years.
- D. Sleeping period. During this period one's room may become the whole world. It is a frightening stage but for the vast majority it lasts only a few weeks.

III. Seeing and understanding seniors as individuals.

- A. They must be seen as the unique persons they are, instead of only as parents.
- B. It is important to reflect a positive self-image back to the parent. Parents need to continue to feel an adequate self-image. Our self-image comes from our work mirror. As the work mirror is taken away and the social and activities mirrors are diminished, the family mirror becomes most important in helping parents maintain a positive self-image.
- C. Meaningful use of time can be encouraged. Seniors are aided by doing something helpful and constructive with their time. As physical capabilities diminish, they need assistance in doing something worthwhile. Fulfillment in later years is

very important. There may be a group discussion on the subject of activities which provide a meaningful use of time for seniors.

Second Session

I. Housing and out-of-home-care.

- A. Where do the elderly live? Some elderly are fortunate to live where they have always lived. Others have to move several times. Often the elderly want to move where the children and grandchildren live or to a retirement community of many conveniences.
- B. How should housing be selected? Helping people live independently is a foremost objective. Daily activities should be as convenient as possible in order to be able to live without an auto and with bus transportation near by. There should be a shopping center in the near vicinity. Few steps should be climbed. Doorways should be found wide enough for walkers and wheel chairs. Quarters should be easy to heat.
- C. Where should housing be located? Housing should be near shopping centers which provide services to the individual, in a low crime rate area, and also near a public park or recreation area.
- D. What about the financial factor? In considering this include taxes, repairs, insurance, and services. When renting, is the landlord responsive to wishes of the renter?

II. Specialized housing for the elderly.

- A. Independent living. There are whole communities that are

designed for the elderly. Some elderly do not like the "restricted living" area. But areas restricted to the elderly provide special conveniences. They are: dining facilities, infirmary or hospital care and recreational areas. Included in this group are retirement hotels and mobile home parks.

- B. Supportive home care. Residential care facilities for the less independent persons are also available. These include residential homes which provide food service and home nursing. These also include intermediate facilities and convalescent hospitals. People who cannot live alone any longer are residents.
- C. Out of home care selection should involve the patient and all family members. Study present and future needs, with financial aspects in mind. Ask whether it is healthy socially and physically for the patient. Review family relationships and support to the aging person. Select three or more facilities that meet both family and patient's needs. Visit several facilities and observe the following: the physical setting, the size, privacy, dining facility, the telephone and also the odor. It should not be depressing to live in. Also observe the attitude of the staff. Notice the visiting hours. Sample the food for taste and preparation. Are patient activities planned? Select one facility, be slow to change and list the complaints of the patient as they are reported. Change residences only after careful evaluation.

Third Session

I. Business Management.

- A. The elderly should be kept involved in business matters as long as they are able, yet with the interest of the family and the insistence of some appointed member of the family to have knowledge of the finances for the protection of the parents. Many elderly have lost their savings to con artists who look for ways of stealing.
- B. It should also be understood by the younger members of the family that money has a different meaning to the elderly. The elderly have an unrealistic outlook on their funds when they view it their only single life support system.
- C. Family members should decide together how much financial assistance is needed by the older members of the family, how the funds will be raised and who will disburse and be responsible for the funds.
- D. It is important to keep good records of financial transactions, whether they are the funds of the senior adult or the funds contributed by the children. Trust must be maintained.
- E. Members of the class should understand conservatorships, trusts and wills. Wills must be kept up to date.
- F. Medical insurance for the elderly is important when it can be obtained. Medicare should be understood as insurance and Medicaid as assistance. Medicaid pays for certain medical care when funds are not available. Medicare is government financial aid to cover certain expenditures and is available to the taxpayer for making previous contributions to the government. Both are in the Social Security law and both are supported by federal dollars. Medicare pays 45% of older

people's health expenses. The balance must come from Medicaid or from their own savings. Medicare was intended to serve the medical needs of the old but it has failed the most pressing need, that of chronic care for longterm diseases and disabilities.

Fourth Session

I. Health and physical well being in later years.

- A. The meaning of illness to the patient and to the significant others.
- B. Enforced role changes for patient and family members.
Members must understand the concept of invulnerability.
- C. The patient's feeling of hopelessness and helplessness when gripped with disease. People must psychologically adapt to change when previously healthy elderly persons become bed-ridden and need total care. The family must be sensitive to this.

II. Grief process of illness.²⁴

- A. Preoccupation with former healthy self and past years due to loss of physical strength and body power.
- B. Anger. This second step is often transferred to the person closest to the patient out of frustration and anguish.
- C. Appeal for help. This often goes unrecognized.
- D. Period of despair. This is observed in disorganized behavior.

²⁴Adapted from John Bowlby, in Claire L. Jackson, "Grief Process Of Illness," Work, XXXII:2 (February 1963), 129-44.

E. Acceptance. Patient gives up pre-illness goals and fantasies and accepts present altered realistic goals.

III. Signals of emergency need are different with the elderly.

- A. The magic word is "change." Anytime there is a significant change in the person, there is a physical or psychological reason.
- B. What do you do in an emergency? Reassure the patient. Don't leave the patient alone. Contact appropriate medical resource. Describe symptoms to the doctor, not the diagnosis. Call police if proper medical source cannot be found. If a person is moved from home, notify the neighbors.
- C. Major illness and disabilities in later years. Discussion might include stroke, heart condition, high blood pressure, cancer, emphysema, arthritis, diabetes, and broken bones. This might include a simple description of each and the way the body is affected in general as well as the impact upon the patient and the resulting affect upon the family.

Fifth Session

- I. What is a good death for the aged?
 - A. When is it appropriate to let them die?
 - B. What about the senior adult who does not want to be kept alive?
 - C. What is dying in dignity?
 - D. What about a living will?
 - E. What is the hospice home concept? (A new concept in serving the terminally ill).

- F. Are persons really living if life is not meaningful for them?
 - G. Does the continuation of life have meaning for loved ones when the person is hardly recognizable? Is the body merely a poorly functioning machine?
 - H. When shall the family gather to answer these questions and decide on a policy of action? As long as no one asks you can let these questions be, but once they are asked, you can't put them down.
- II. What persons are usually in the position to deal with the questions that decide the life of the patient? Most often this is the spouse of the patient. Next is the adult child or the adult grand-child. Others that may be involved include the physician, nursing team, religious consultant, and finally the counseling team (psychologist or psychiatrist).
- III. What questions often have to be faced?
- A. Will treatment prolong living or will it prolong dying?
 - B. Will the treatment plan treat the whole person or the disfunctioning parts of the body?
 - C. Should a human body be kept alive at all costs?
 - D. After the patient dies, will I be able to accept my part in the decision of the length of life?
 - E. Can I permit the patient to die or is my happiness predicated on his living?
 - F. What priority rating do I place on my feelings and emotional needs in relation to emotional needs of the patient?
 - G. How will the decisions made affect family relationships in the future?

IV. What is your relationship to the grieving process?

- A. What is normal and abnormal grief?
- B. Does it bother you to see and hear people cry?
- C. Can other people feel free to express their grief around you?

V. How to decide about proper ways of honoring the deceased.

- A. What are the options to funeral services, memorial services, burial, cremation and entombments. What services do mortuaries and memorial societies offer?
- B. What would you prefer for yourself?
- C. Have you talked about it with your parents?

VI. How can we make the most of the days we have left?

- A. Talks we never had.
- B. Matters we could never bring up.
- C. Faith of our fathers, holy faith. Is there anything to be afraid of or do we find strength in our faith?

In the entire matter of the relationship of the elderly and their children it is well to remember:

It is a myth that the aged are alienated from their children. There is a process of filial maturity. When the child can no longer look to the parent for comfort and care there is still an appreciation. The relationship of the child to the parent leaves behind the rebellion of early adulthood. The child begins to separate from the adult as an individual with rights, needs, limitations in his own life history, apart from the parent figure. Role reversal does not happen. The parent does not become the child of his or her own children. Rather than the parent becoming dependent on the child, the parent sees the child as dependable. The parent retains his own autonomy.²⁵

²⁵Margaret Blenkner, "Social Structure Of The Family," in Generational Relations (New York: Prentice Hall, 1965).

Sibling relationships are often disturbed when there is a crisis. Past disagreements often surface. A crisis of losing a parent may open up old wounds among the children, but it need not be so if the children are aware this can happen.

Emotional transference often occurs with a death of a spouse. The widow will transfer her need to the son, or the widower will transfer his need to the daughter.

There is still something to be brought before the class which is the heart of the Scripture. We could call it the golden rule, which is "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It is a basic sense of human kindness. The elderly need this sense of compassion and human kindness shared with them.

It is most difficult, when you are feeling well and strong yourself, to realize what it is like to feel ill and weak. It is not easy, when you know you are needed, to understand the fear of not being needed. It is almost impossible, when you are full of important plans for the future, to visualize a state of being where the future seems to hold little or nothing of importance.

Yet older people face these problems daily, and it is not surprising that sometimes a feeling of futility begins to crowd in upon them. Often they have lost the person they loved most in the world. The loss of love is always a tragic thing. They look ahead and see nothing but gathering shadows. They may begin to ask themselves what's the use of anything.

That is when the younger generation should and can and must come to their aid, not only with material things, but with a deep understanding of the power of love to sustain and heal and comfort. It is impossible to exaggerate this power of love in human affairs; it is the keystone of the arch of living; in the last analysis it is life itself. And the amazing thing about love is that giving it is just as beneficial and rewarding as receiving it.²⁶

Love and concern is a great gift to share with elderly people or with anyone. It still is one of the best ways to honor your father

²⁶Blanton, p. 247.

and your mother. It is a wonderful goal for the child of elderly parents to achieve.

The special courses for retired persons suggested in this chapter can be offered several times in one year by a "task force on aging" in the local church. The class need not be large. The graduates could return to help teach future classes. From time to time people should be invited back to report on how their new retirement careers are developing. The children of aging parents should be invited to return to offer help to new adult children who need help with their parents.

CHAPTER IV

RESOURCES OF THE COMMUNITY FOR THE CHURCH

TO SERVE THE ELDERLY

Unfortunately, as America idolizes the youth of the nation and turns its interests away from aging, the elderly of the community become neglected. As the nation dreams and plans for those not yet born who will become the future generations the present older generation becomes forgotten. As great amounts of money are provided for sending people off into space, the people of this world are overlooked concerning basic needs of shelter and health. These people are the senior citizens who helped build our nation and its greatness into what it is today.

The community likes to honor the elderly with reduced bus fares and discounted theater tickets, but overlook or refuse to deal with more important matters. The local church is called to take notice of the housing needs of the elderly and investigate government programs which are available to meet the growing problem of senior housing for low income elderly.

In San Diego County, there are more than 203,000 persons 60 years of age and older living among the county's 1.5 million total population making San Diego County the second largest home for senior citizens in the nation.

Elderly people in San Diego County have been overlooked when it comes to providing enough decent and affordable housing for those who have incomes lower than average. There are roughly 150,000 senior

citizens in San Diego County who have incomes of less than \$8,700.00 per year. According to the county's Office of Senior Citizens Affairs there are 19,375 elderly households with incomes of less than \$4,000.00 per year. The 1970 Census found the median income for elderly households in the city of San Diego to be \$4,032.00. Forty-three percent of the elderly population rent their homes. Sixty-eight percent of the elderly households who rent pay more than the customary twenty-five percent of their incomes for housing expenses.

Of the estimated 6,900 substandard dwellings in the City of San Diego--those with inadequate plumbing or structural deficiencies--seventeen percent are occupied by senior citizens.

Seniors face the problems of low income people who seek adequate and decent housing. They are vulnerable to inflation because many live on fixed incomes or on incomes which do not begin to keep up with rising living costs. In 1975 as rental unit vacancies dropped to between one and two percent in the San Diego area, rents increased by more than ten percent. As the rental housing supply continues to be outpaced by continuing and increasing demand, experts predict further rental increases of ten to fifteen percent.

Since new federal and state financing for housing is now available to local churches to sponsor housing programs for the low income elderly the author of this paper feels the local church must become more concerned about the important matter of housing for the elderly.

CHURCH SPONSORED HOUSING FOR SENIORS

The problem of adequate housing for low income families is not confined to the elderly, yet it is particularly cruel for them. One response to the problem of providing good housing for seniors has been through federally and state assisted housing programs, known by any one of several titles.

An early program, known as Section 202 of the 1959 Housing Act, made available direct federal loans at 3 percent interest for the full cost of building housing for limited-income elderly tenants. At the time the program was terminated in 1969, a total of 45,000 dwelling units had been produced throughout the United States by various sponsoring non-profit organizations.

The Housing Act of 1968 created the Section 236 program which differed from the 202 program in several ways. It could be used by both profit and nonprofit sponsoring organizations; tenants could be of any age, and the federal government made monthly payments to the lender on behalf of the sponsor in an amount sufficient to reduce the interest rate on the sponsor's mortgage rate to one percent. Prior to the termination of the program, an estimated 40,000 units per year were built.

Section 8 of the Housing Act of 1974 was a new approach to housing subsidies. Under this program the developer or builder is not subsidized. The federal government helps with the monthly rental payment of the tenant. In an approved project, the federal government will pay the difference between 25 percent of the tenant's income and the actual monthly rental figure. Builders submit proposed projects

to the Department of Housing and Urban Development and if approved, the government contracts with the builder to subsidize rents in the project. The section also provides for existing apartment units to be accepted and approved for the rental subsidy program.

One problem with Section 8 is the small number of units provided for low-income elderly people. As in the Section 236 program, Section 8 is not concerned exclusively with elderly low-income households.

A revitalized 202 program for 1976 provided \$375 million dollars to eligible sponsors for construction or substantial rehabilitation of dwelling units for the elderly and handicapped. Sponsors would borrow directly from HUD amounts of up to 100 percent of the total development costs of their projects, through a long-term 40-year loan at an interest rate charge related to the current long-term rate paid by the U.S. Treasury in its borrowing activities.

HUD has received applications for more than 1,500 projects, requesting financing for the construction of more than 230,000 units. However, the HUD budget allocation is for between 12,000 and 14,000 new units with 3,600 of these scheduled for actual construction during 1976. This paper recommends the revitalized 202 program for a local church interested in providing housing for the low-income elderly. Rental subsidy can be obtained for the occupants of a 202 project but those who receive the aid must meet certain qualifications.

In California, a state effort in the low-income housing area has been made with the creation of the California Housing Finance Agency, created to act as a mortgage banker between funds raised from the sale of state bonds and users. The CHFA has funds to support

programs in 1977 and should be contacted by any local church which is interested in obtaining funds for housing the low-income elderly.

There is a housing shortage for the elderly, and especially low-income elderly in San Diego. Federal and state financing programs are now available to start housing projects for the low-income elderly and hopefully more churches will consider this way to serve the community. Professional housing management services can be contacted to advise a committee in a local church as to the steps it should follow in learning whether building housing for the elderly would be advisable or not and how to go about approaching the proper government agencies for proper applications to the best program.

PERSONAL COUNSELING IN CHURCH SPONSORED HOUSING

To build an apartment house for seniors with federal or state funds is not enough, since people at this age have special needs which have to be taken into consideration. After Green Manor, a 202 project sponsored by the Mission Hills First Congregational Church was opened in the fall of 1970, it soon became apparent that a special counselor was needed to meet the requests and problems of the people who lived in the building. The Board of Directors of Green Manor, realizing that something should be done, requested that the management firm of Jack Falkenberg and Associates, of Pasadena, California, who had been contacted to manage and operate Green Manor, help find a way of financing another staff person who would serve as a personal counselor to the residents of Green Manor. Since no government funds were available to pay for such a service, Mr. Falkenberg approached the Department of Housing and Urban Development and explained the problem,

and asked permission to include the cost of a counselor in the rent of each apartment in the building. HUD approved the small rent increase and a counselor was hired through the Senior Adult Services of San Diego. This was the first known time that HUD has permitted this kind of counseling service to be paid for by the residents through their rent. The Green Manor counseling program was shared with two other 202 projects sponsored by another church which means that three apartment building programs are served by one counselor. The office for the counselor was contributed by the Mission Hills-First Congregational Church. The job description that was developed encompassed the following:

Under the direct supervision of Senior Adult Services the Residents Counselor shall be responsible to provide a range of social services for the residents of senior housing facilities within the policies of the client, facility and community. The range of social services shall be provided in order to:

1. Assist the residents in coping with the crises, illness, finances, physical decline, death of spouses, etc., that occur increasingly during the later years.
2. Enable the residents to maintain the maximum use of meaningful, independent living through identification and appropriate uses of community services resources.
3. Assist residents when necessary to review the need for and secure appropriate other types of supportive housing or out-of-home care.

The duties and responsibilities of the residents counselor in order to carry out the purposes shall include 1) consulting weekly with the resident manager at each of the facilities, 2) initiating and directing a group counseling program in each facility for the residents on subjects selected by them, 3) provide individual counseling and all necessary community contacts, 4) carry out any other duties that may be considered appropriate for the purposes of the service.

A one year contract was signed with Jack Falkenberg Associates and Senior Adult Services, Inc., subject to a six month review. This ecumenical venture brought together in a unique way the church, social services, and a management firm in a joint effort to provide services

for the elderly living in specialized senior apartment buildings.

This unique ministry enables older adults to extend the years of meaningful and independent living through the appropriate use of community resources, and, when necessary, assists the residents and their families to assess the need and select more supportive institutional care.

Establishing the plan was one thing, but bringing it to a success was another. The ultimate success would be whether the residents would accept the program, be willing to accept the counselor as a help to them, use him as they might have need of him, and finally, to be willing to pay for his service through their rent without complaining to HUD, who was watching the development of the program very closely.

The counselor, Mr. Milton Spector, worked assiduously to be accepted by the older adults in the three facilities under contract of the Jack Falkenberg Associates, to overcome the barrier of the fear of outsiders. One by one and in couples the residents began to seek him out for help in one-time crises or in situations of continuing need.

One elderly woman had feelings of extreme guilt about living with a man for over 25 years without benefit of marriage and came to Mr. Spector for help. The problem was compounded by the ostracism of her family. After helping her to work through her feelings about beliefs, values and attitudes, this woman was able to make an overture to her family. In response, she received a call from them asking her to visit them. Mr. Spector continued to work with her as she restored her family ties.

Hallucinating is not unusual in some older people. One resident believed her telephone was bugged by the F.B.I., and she kept her doors locked, refusing to talk to anyone, not even her daughter. Over a period of two months the residents counselor was able to gain her confidence. She is now communicating with her daughter and feels that Mr. Spector is protecting her from the F.B.I. With this reassurance, she has been able to continue living independently in spite of her limitations.

Alcoholism compounded a marital problem of one of the resident couples. The residents counselor found the wife to be very gregarious, enjoying both volunteer and social activities. Her husband had spent his life time "wrapped up" in his work and had never learned to make friends. In retirement he found himself left alone and became increasingly jealous of his wife's activities. He turned increasingly to alcohol as a substitute. Through a series of counseling sessions they both gained a greater understanding of each other's needs at this time in their life and their marriage returned to a better relationship.

One of the group activities designed to provide a service to the residents and to help the residents to gain trust in the counselor was that of providing blood pressure checks within the buildings. This was offered in each of the apartment buildings and many of the occupants took advantage of the service. Another service brought into the facilities by the residents counselor was that of a local podiatrist who spoke on general foot care and provided some diagnostic screening.

In an interview with Mr. Spector, he reported that most of his work is with women. They outnumber the men 25 to 1 among the over

500 residents in the three high-rise housing complexes. He does work on special events for the men. One event was to ride in the patrol cars of the San Diego Police Department. Tours were arranged to visit the Naval facilities in San Diego also.

Other services Mr. Spector has aimed for is to encourage the residents to get involved in community projects, and to assist with Medicare claims as well as Social Security, Supplemental Security Income and Veterans benefits. It is evident that the forty hours per week help provided by the residents counseling service only just begin to meet some of the problems of seniors in the housing community. It is a model that appears to be unique and meets a unique need and demonstrates that it does extend the period of time in which many seniors can remain in independent living. Yet it is also a model through which the resident finds the transition out of this world easier to bear because s/he knows someone cares and is standing by ready to help when needed.

The problem that Mr. Spector has to deal with the most is the loneliness that the residents live with. Due to the estrangement of loneliness, people withdraw and isolate themselves. Neighbors of those who withdraw are encouraged to be in contact with Mr. Spector that he might visit the lonely or troubled person.

An important condition which became apparent to the counselor was the sense of low esteem the people in the senior apartments hold of themselves. The people look upon themselves as they think other people see them. The reaction is an inward self-hatred which takes the form of depression, anxiety and not caring for themselves.

The telephone at the church where Mr. Spector has his office rings mostly for him. The elderly call to talk with a friend who can give good advice and counsel. This counselor holds a special place in the lives of people who find themselves in one of the last stages of life and who need support from someone who is specialized in giving assistance.

The following attachments are presented to give an in-depth understanding of the work of the residents counselor:

Table 1
 Senior Adult Services, Inc.
 RESIDENTS COUNSELING PROGRAM
RESIDENT DISTRIBUTION BY AGE AND LOCATION
 December, 1976

<u>Years of Age</u>	<u>Grace Towers</u>		<u>Green Manor</u>		<u>Cathedral Arms</u>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
69 and Under	15	8.93	27	16.27	24	11.26
70-74	16	9.52	42	25.30	50	23.47
75-79	54	32.14	51	30.72	67	31.45
80-84	57	33.93	29	17.47	46	21.60
85-89	20	11.90	14	8.43	22	10.33
90+	6	3.57	3	1.80	4	1.88
	108	99.99	166	99.99	213	99.99

1/31/77

Table 2

Senior Adult Services, Inc.

RESIDENTS COUNSELING PROGRAM

DISTRIBUTION OF RESIDENTS AND COUNSELING SERVICES

Occupancy Date	Grace Towers (168 Residents)	Green Manor (166 Residents)	Cathedral Arms (213 Residents)	Total
	1967	1970	1972	
Resident Population by Age				
74 years of age and under	5.67%	12.61%	13.53%	31.81%
75-89 years of age and over	23.95%	17.18%	24.68%	65.81%
90 and over	<u>1.09%</u>	<u>0.55%</u>	<u>0.73%</u>	<u>2.37</u>
Total Population	30.71%	30.35%	38.94%	100.00%
Counseling Services - one full time Counselor	34.62%	27.97%	37.39%	100.00%

1/31/77

Table 3

Senior Adult Services, Inc.

RESIDENTS COUNSELING PROGRAM

ANALYSIS OF MONTHLY ACTIVITIES

(based on August, September & October, 1976 Activities)

Hours	% of 40 Hour Week	Type of Activity
75	43.28%	In-Home contacts with residents (see details below)
49	28.27%	Telephone contacts with residents and service providers
18	10.39%	Consultation with building managers (15 minutes per day per manager)
15	8.65%	Visits to offices of service providers with residents with sensory and mental functioning limitations
11	6.35%	Information counseling in lobbies and halls of buildings (10 minutes per day per building) to promote trusting relationships and respond to crises
11	6.35%	Recording and other office work (30 minutes per day)
<u>4</u>	<u>2.31%</u>	Supervision from Senior Adult Services
183	105.60% -	Total - 20 hours overtime per month donated by Counselor

ANALYSIS OF IN-HOUSE CONTACTS WITH RESIDENTS

Hours	% of 40 Hour Week	Type of Service Provided
40	23.08%	34 therapeutic counseling sessions - to assist residents in coping with crisis or chronic stress
19	10.96%	16 units of business/legal management services, e.g., medical bills, insurance claims, wills, etc.

Table 3 (continued)

Hours	% of 40 Hour Week	
6	3.46%	Permanent relocation counseling--family residential care facilities, convalescent hospitals
4	2.31%	In-home services counseling--homemakers, home nursing, therapists, etc.
3	1.73%	Temporary institutional care counseling--acute or short term convalescent hospital care
2	1.15%	Escort services--emergency situations requiring staff escort
<u>1</u>	<u>0.59%</u>	Protective services--mental health, day care, etc.
75	43.28%	Total

THE ELDERLY AS A COMMUNITY RESOURCE

The church makes a mistake if it overlooks the elderly themselves as qualified resources to serve the elderly through the church. The senior citizen is a person of many talents and a person of many years of experience. In building a special program for senior citizens or a task force on aging, who are better to involve than those who will be the participants and those who have the free time to do it? Older people wish to feel useful, to continue contributing actively to the welfare of others, to feel wanted because of their contributions. One of the major outlets for their abilities can be the church and its various organizations and activities. Older people can serve as members of a "Volunteer Christian Corps," as Professor Elton Trueblood suggests, after their retirement from secular occupations. Some of them can even serve as business managers of the church.¹

Both as the official representatives of the church and as its constituents in the community, the senior citizen can help make the outreach of the church more effective and extend its influence upon civic affairs and community organizations. We have a hand in glove effect. The senior citizen needs the church for what it has to offer and the church needs the person resource it finds in the senior citizen to fulfill its program objective.

What can the senior citizen do in the church? We would have to say, almost anything. This qualified person, who is over the fear of facing people, is capable of standing in the pulpit and sharing in the

¹Elton Trueblood, Your Other Vocation (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 53.

leadership of worship services or if need be, calling out the bingo numbers in a gala event. This is to say, the elderly can be called into leadership positions when they are not too taxing. Many of them are no longer frightened by being with people. Their years of experience have helped them to manage that. So if it be as a worship leader, or to make a presentation before City Hall, the senior is capable of being a leader.

Seniors are capable of teaching any subject to any age, even seniors. They can teach children, young adults or the middle aged. They have been through these ages before. But best of all, they can help other seniors learn the fact of aging and accept it realistically. Seniors are the most capable people to teach the last years of life. They are going through the process of the experience.

Seniors are very capable of assisting in the visitation program of the church.² They can visit new people who come to the various programs of the church as well as visit with older people who have been taken to rest homes and hospitals.

Churches have a number of jobs that need manual labor, whether it is repairing broken equipment, painting the building or taking care of the trees and yard outside. These things need to be done and they can be done quite well by the retired people of the church who enjoy doing that kind of work. The church needs to inform people who have these kinds of skills and interests, and the response will be quite favorable.

²Harold Hazenfield, "Older Adults Can Serve the Church," International Journal of Religious Education, XXX:5 (January 1954), 16.

Clerical work in the local church is quite necessary. The retired people in a local church have had experiences in this field. The larger the church, the more demanding the clerical work.

The church will find that with the services of the elderly, the church will be able to function much more efficiently. Intelligent study of the needs of the church and of the interests and abilities of seniors can lead to a matching of needs and abilities. As a result, both the church and senior adults will benefit, the roles of both the young and the old in the church will be modified, and the entire program of the church will take on renewed vigor and gain respect in the community. The influence and service of the church can be greatly extended with almost no monetary cost through voluntary lay workers.

As the older person loses his life in sincere service to people in the community, he will find a more abundant life, the life that is characterized by good personal and social adjustment.

Aging can be 'the last of life for which the first was planned,' a time of happiness and contentment, or it can be the most miserable period of life. It is he or she who gives the most in old age who in turn receives the most. This giving can continue even by the shut-in person who may not leave his or her home until the body is prepared for its final resting place, just as it can by the older person who is physically and mentally in the best of health.³

The resource for the local church to achieve a program to serve senior adults in the community may best be found among the seniors of the community. Those who are invited to participate must be given a free hand and a free expression in the creation of and the operation of the program.

³Robert Gray and David Moberg, The Church and the Older Person (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 144.

SUMMARY

A social revolution is quietly taking place in communities across America. One-thousand people become sixty-five years old every day. A high percentage of this age group faces a change in their life style due to forced retirement from their occupations. It means a greater number of people living on less money in an economic period of inflation. For many retired people it means a loss of social status and personal self-esteem since they are no longer employed or completely self-supporting. It also means for many retired people that they are too old to be productive members of society and now they must accept a position of inactivity. The elderly are often afraid of dying and at the same time afraid of outliving their capacity to cope with sickness. The worst nightmare is that of a long-term illness which wipes out all financial resources. Medicare and Medicaid have substantially eased the financial burdens of health care for the elderly, ensuring that they can withstand even serious illness without losing everything.

For many Americans, however, retirement itself--whether by force or by choice--can be the most traumatic experience of growing old. The shock of suddenly having nothing to do, the feeling of being put on a shelf, can bring on profound physical and emotional crises, especially among people who derive their self-esteem from their work.

The sudden population explosion of the elderly in America has serious ramifications for the nation. The local church which resides in the community where the retired and aging people live, through a special ministry to the aging can help solve this new national problem. As a rule, the American people honor and respect the elderly, but often

it is only lip service. The church is called to show a new concern among the people of the land to serve the elderly in an imaginative way.

To realize the importance of serving the elderly the church must recover something of its own Judeo-Christian tradition. The early Judeo community held its elderly people in high esteem for they believed that the wisdom of God was directly related to the wisdom of the elderly. The elderly were honored for their age and were therefore properly respected by the members of the community as they continued to age.

Next, the church must have a basic conviction about aging as a part of God's plan for human life. When people reject God's plan and process of human life, serious emotional and psychological problems develop. The Bible offers a theological model to view man's rejection of God's plan. The creation story portrays the unfortunate experience of Adam and Eve disobeying God. Adam and Eve believed they had a better idea for themselves than God had planned. They violated the one request God had made of them. They were expelled from the Garden of Eden as a result of their actions. God's plan for mankind is to be born and to age, to enjoy and make good use of any age. When man rejects his own aging he rejects God's plan and soon finds himself cast out of the good life.

God has acted in human history to help human life be redeemed at any age through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has a unique way of helping people find renewal and self-acceptance. The later years of life also have their own special rewards for those who will go in search of them. Life is timeless in the plan of God. When man accepts God's life plan, the retirement years as well as death itself are met without

fear and with great hope and courage. Life is good at any age when it is met with faith in God's plan.

A theology of aging is the springboard for caring for the aging, for it declares that the last day of life is as valuable as the first day of life. The later years are as important as the early years. Hence the church is called to help the later years be good years. To do so, the church is encouraged to help people plan their retirement career. People need to understand that a successful retirement doesn't happen accidentally, it must be achieved through proper planning.

The children of elderly parents have a strategic part to play in helping successful retirement to come about. The adult child through proper understanding of the aging process can assist parents to manage their affairs and to keep a positive outlook on life. Being sensitive to the needs of aging parents the adult child can also help the elderly to endure the last events of life of suffering and dependency.

In recent years the federal and state agencies have designed programs to assist the elderly in the important area of housing. The programs invite the participation of non-profit community organizations to cooperate with the government to create living quarters for the elderly. Professional management firms are available to assist local churches in undertaking a federal or state financed housing project at no cost.

The church is encouraged to create an expanded ministry to the aging by cooperating with community agencies which specialize in meeting the needs of the aging. The elderly themselves are able to

provide the leadership in the local church for such a program when their talents are requested. The local church will find a great satisfaction in serving the elderly of the community for in so doing it will be fulfilling its purpose as a living instrument in the hand of God.

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